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THE IMPACT OF SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED STATUS ON SCHOOL LEARNING AND ADJUSTMENT.

BY- HAMBURGER, MARTIN

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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH GENERALIZES TOO FREELY ABOUT THE EFFECT OF LOWER-CLASS CULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE MIDDLE-CLASS SCHOOL ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD. IF INSTEAD EDUCATORS CONSIDERED THE RANGES AND VARIATIONS OF EACH OF THESE INFLUENCES, AND THE VARIABLES ACCOUNTING FOR THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS AS WELL AS HIS FAILURE, THEY MIGHT REALIZE THAT IT IS ONLY WHEN THE VALUES OF THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT ARE ALIGNED WITH MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES THAT ACHIEVEMENT IN SCHOOL OCCURS. TOO OFTEN, UNDER THE GUISE OF RESPECTING THE "PHENOMENOLOGY" OF LOWER-CLASS CULTURE, EDUCATORS MAKE NO ATTEMPT TO INTERVENE ACTIVELY TO PREPARE THE DISADVANTAGED FOR THOROUGH ABSORPTION INTO THE PREVAILING MIDDLE-CLASS SOCIETY. WHETHER IT IS ETHICALLY RIGHT OR WRONG, ONLY WHEN THESE YOUTHS ACCEPT THE MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES IMPLICIT IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WILL THEY SUCCESSFULLY REMAIN IN SCHOOL. THUS COUNSELORS MUST TALK TO STUDENTS TRUTHFULLY AND REALISTICALLY ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND THE IMPOVERISHED CONDITIONS IN WHICH THEY LIVE. OTHERWISE THE STUDENT MAY DEVELOP CONFLICTS AND DEFENSES WHICH WILL MAKE HIM REJECT THE SCHOOL, WHICH IS CAUSING THIS CONFLICT, AND WILL IMBED HIMSELF ONCE AGAIN IN THE DETRIMENTAL SECURITY OF HIS LOWER-CLASS WORLD. (LB)

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DEAN FISHMAN:

Our first speaker was a visitor to the field of guidance from social psychology. Our next speaker is a native in the field of guidance. Dr. Martin Hamburger, who will speak to us on "The Impact of Socially Disadvantaged Status on School Learning and School Adjustment," has been one of the leading figures in providing the kind of advanced theory and the kind of stable, fundamental research that the field of guidance has needed for a very long time and needs to this very day. However, he is also an academician who has long recognized his responsibilities toward social problems. It was in connection with a study that he was doing on the attitudes of American adolescents toward the entire American democratic tradition that I first met him. After having met him in that connection, it was absolutely no surprise to me to learn that he was also active in the field of the socially and culturally disadvantaged and among the first to be concerned with it. It is a very real pleasure to introduce him to you at this time.

DR. MARTIN HAMBURGER

01385

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

"THE IMPACT OF SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED STATUS ON SCHOOL LEARNING AND ADJUSTMENT"

I will try to interpret my assignment rather freely. I will try to offer some critical evaluations of current research on the impact of disadvantaged status, to point up some of the gaps and problems of this research, to suggest several different ways of looking at what we now seemingly know and, finally, to propose several hypotheses about the guidance of disadvantaged children that have occurred to me in the process of this examination. If we are concerned with "impact" we are clearly talking about forces and dynamics. In reality we are

talking about two sets of dynamics: On one hand we are talking about the child, the culture, and all the forces and variables involved there. On the other hand, we are talking about the variables involved in the school, in the teachers, in the equipment, and all the other factors that go into the functioning of a school. Unfortunately, most of the studies that have dealt with these relationships have been fairly mechanical. They have been mechanical primarily because there has been a tendency to generalize about the first set of forces and to generalize about the second set of forces. The sweeping generalizations typically refer to "the culturally deprived." However, what we have here is obviously a tremendous number of different types. The typology of the culturally deprived is far from being clear. We have so many variables to deal with and yet what we have done is to simplify what is inherently not a simple matter. We have done this since the day that Warner introduced the Yankee City series and began to give us diagrams that finally made Life magazine. The diagrams typically show that there are people who live "this way" and who are classified accordingly and that there are people living "that way" and who are classified differently. From Lloyd Warner through to Vance Packard we have developed a fairly mechanical picture of what "lower class" is. This, I am afraid, has robbed us of a good deal of the understanding that we could have about the problem of "impact" that we are talking about today. On the other hand, from the mechanical picture that we have, there now typically emerges "the villain" of the piece. The "middle class teacher" and the middle class textbook, and the middle class school and the middle class test have all been portrayed as being the reason why the impact of lower class status is a very, very unfriendly one. If we are to follow through the notion of forces, a better understanding of what dynamics really are is required. Dynamics mean the subtlety of forces, those

that are apparent, those that are not; those that are rational, those that are irrational. By generalizing about these sets of forces I am afraid that we haven't gotten an accurate understanding of what this impact is, except in the following picture which I shall paint in very broad strokes. The picture seems to be somewhat like this: The difference between deprived youths and others is that those in the first group get low grades, they don't care about school, they drop out readily, they never develop reading skills to any extent, they are very restless, they are inattentive, they don't sit still, they can't wait until the day is over, they are trouble makers, they are difficult to deal with, they are dirty, etc. About the time you get done cataloguing these characteristics (and there are thousands and thousands of correlation matrixes which show differences between one class and the other), you have a picture which implies that there are only two alternatives left; one of them is that we go ahead and change the schools and the other is that we change the children. Well it is obvious that we can't do either very readily and this is the reason why in our time we have been so very, very concerned about what "impact" means.

If we take a look at the kind of lives lower class individuals lead, we have other sets of generalizations. They live in miserable housing, have poor nutrition, they are very heavily concentrated in certain ethnic groups, they have poor employment, low income, the homes are typically broken, the motiviation for learning is not very high in the home, etc. This all has been catalogued and documented. What we get as we begin to look at these generalizations is a picture which typically results in our feeling quite inadequate, quite defeated, quite futile. I want to point out (in connection with some of Dr. Riessman's comments about the increased interest in lower class problems) that much of this comes at a time when urban community resources for improving these conditions

are worse than ever. This means that the sense of futility which we have, when combined with the sense of guilt that teachers, counselors and other personnel feel when they are confronted with these matters, is very great and quite immobilizing.

What we must look at, in addition to the very real facts of poverty and deprivation, is the tremendous variations in each of these groups. The fact is that the ranges are fantastic and the overlapping is much more significant than the differences between the means. I deplore the sentimental concept that there may indeed be something really hidden, something really valuable in the low income group; there must be "gold in them thar hills" and we must try to search out this gold. Actually the gold is not hidden gold. According to all the results we have, even with biased I.Q. tests, there is already available and obvious a considerable amount of talent even in the most underprivileged groups. What we need to know is: how did this happen? How did people who came from the worst circumstances manage to emerge with such high I.Q.'s? This means, very clearly, a greatly detailed and refined approach to research on not so much the variables or the factors or the symptoms, but rather on the process by which people learn or unlearn. What we do not have at this point is very much on process. We don't have very much on dynamics. We do not know very much about the dialectics of deprivation. Even in the most deprived we have, side by side, the underprivileged who are motivated primarily by primary impulses and also the underprivileged who are concerned about morality, who are prudish about sex, who are very concerned about mutual aid and cooperation and not at all intent on satisfying immediate needs. These people exist side by side. Among the underprivileged we have very poor verbal behavior and yet we also know that from folklore and from many other sources there is a very rich verbal behavior among some of them.

Well, we can't have it both ways without facing up to the fact that what we are missing when we merely look at correlations are the dynamics of how these things emerge. What explains the success of some lower class individuals, and I am not talking about rags to riches; we know very well from recent literature that the typical story is from rags to rags. I am more concerned about the fact that if we can get an understanding of why a youngster in one underprivileged home or in one set of disadvantaged circumstances doesn't display the usual deficiencies, we can perhaps begin to get clues, not only for education but for society. Right now I am engaged in a research which is studying the way in which young people who are called disadvantaged in New York City high schools make use of a job experience while they are juniors and seniors in high school. And in this research, what we are mostly concerned about is how these youngsters do indeed change and how they develop new attitudes which may help them move into society as equal partners and participants. One of the most interesting things I have found in minority group members (disadvantaged minority group members, mostly Negro and Puerto Rican youngsters) is the fact that they are all too realistic. This is one of the most alarming things I have found: The dream, the aspiration, the hope and the wish, the capacity to fantasize isn't there in the measure that it should be in young people. Please don't be misguided by the kinds of things that they sometimes tell guidance counselors. They are often pulling your leg when they tell you stories about what they want to be. Deep down, when we talk to them at length, they express very realistic, all too realistic aspirations. Another very important thing is that, considering the plight of the Negro and Puerto Rican in America, it is amazing how these youngsters express so little hostility toward the system, toward the society. Very little of what James Baldwin wrote in his marvelous articles several months

ago and his book, "The Fire Next Time", is supported by the verbal content of these youngsters. And I dare say that we have a clue here. One of the clues is that these youngsters have succeeded in staying in school as long as they have precisely because they have become conformists. This leads me back to a consideration of the dynamics involved.

My concern here is with making sure that as we look at the culturally deprived, or the disadvantaged, or the minority group, that we focus, as guidance workers, on a very essential point. We are concerned with development. We are talking about providing the tools and equipment which will enable people to develop new characteristics. We want to enable them to make differentiations in their environment and then to perform integrating kinds of behavior which will move them ahead to suitable new experiences and to the development of new characteristics. We don't really want to "move them a notch up." By development we are talking about new modalities, new ways of dealing with life, and it is this newness of experience (mostly around the area of verbal and reading and cognitive development) which must be the chief key. This is the key to the power which people can possess when they develop and grow through appropriate guidance in education. It is for this reason that I am so concerned with the fact that what we are often doing is merely entering into the phenomenology of the under-privileged, when what we need to do is to assault that phenomenology. That is what we must consistently recognize. We are dealing here with a massive value system. We cannot change this system via role playing; we cannot do this with non-directive counseling; we cannot do it with testing; we cannot do it with most of the techniques we have developed thus far. We must consciously think in terms of positive intervention, with no holds barred and no apology for being middle class, because in our society middle class means essentially the development

of precisely those new characteristics which do enable people to move up. Now I am not going to get involved in the problem of what is bad about the middle class and what is good; this is not the issue. Middle class means many of the good things in life, and if we want people to have the good things in life, we have got to educate them to be able to do the things middle class people can do. This means that we should not search too much for the gimmicks, the fads, tricks and game that we have heard about. What we have got to do is bear in mind the kind of model which I can most appropriately allude to in the marvelous title by Margaret Meade. I am talking, of course, about her book called "New Lives for Old," in which she offers some lessons to us from her experience in returning twenty five years after having left a group of islanders in the South Seas. In this time these people had moved from the stone age into the jeep age. Although now inevitable, many of us are still trapped by an uncomfortable feeling that "something is being done to people." We believe that by insisting on working as slowly as possible, and through their own cultural values, we are protecting and cherishing them. However, Margaret Meade points up the completeness with which people can want to change rather than merely submit to being changed. She shows that cultural contact can be just as active choice of the emigrants from the stone age as it is for representatives of highly industrialized countries. She says how often has our western world (here we may say, our middle class school) attempted to preserve native dress, old customs, different styles of architecture, native laws and customs, etc., only to disguise our unwillingness to admit a people into full participation in the culture which we claim to value so highly.

This to me is the key as I move into my closing hypothesis. My hypothesis is basically that no matter what the school does, no matter what the teacher does,

no matter what the text-books are, unless young people recognize that they are really going to participate in the society and the culture, the most powerful cognitive experience is not the school, but rather the capacity of every five year old to know what is happening around him. How can a five year old Negro child miss the news from Little Rock or from Birmingham or from New York. What is really important to a five year old in our society is not what he does not know; it's what he does know. As we move children into the most beautiful new schools and into the finest curricula, the most powerful learning that they are exposed to is that which they are drinking in on every side. My hypothesis (and here I borrow a phrase from Robert Lynd who, in his book in 1939, "Knowledge for What", is concerned with applying social science to every day life) is very simply this: that all the vocational guidance, all the vocational testing, all the group work and enrichment cannot overcome what a society as a whole very quickly teaches its deprived and poor. Now this hypothesis is outrageous because it negates the efforts of many men and women of good will and I don't mean to do that. I state it in outrageous terms purposely. I state it, however, to give us perspective in our enterprise and to show that as we proceed in guidance, counseling, teaching and enrichment, what we most appropriately can do is to get the basic raw materials of process which most significantly should be fed right back into society. When we know better what the variables are that account for success as well as failure, this is what we must emphasize. I think that machines, books and equipment may well be secondary to removing whole groups of children to boarding schools for a period of a year. I think that the kind of counseling we must do must be consciously focused on what is happening in the world of these children. From the very elementary grade, rather than role playing we must talk directly to children about what it means to be

poor and what it means to participate and not to participate, so that they do not get all mixed up and develop what can only be mass neurosis in terms of having to make some kind of accommodation.

Let me close by pointing out that Miller and Swanson, in their book on "Inner Conflict and Defense", have tried to deal with a better understanding of these problems. I am suggesting that if these young people encounter inner conflict (which is natural and inevitable) the most appropriate defenses at this point is for them to turn away from the school, which is in many ways (to their tender minds) a lie, and turn to the one natural environment which is the environment that they know so well and which is going to give them comfort, even if it doesn't hold out great promise of progress. If guidance implies a rational, conscious and cognitive effort on the part of the guidance worker, then what is so very important is that the transaction that we engage in with the children and the adolescents must be in every sense of the word consciously and cognitively directed to the real conditions of their lives. I am not so concerned with our providing them with emotional support, or with understanding their phenomenology, as with talking with them directly about what they confront.